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ABSTRACT

A qualitative evaluation related to the creation of a Regional High School of Excellence (RHSE) in upstate New York is described. The focus is on a summer pilot study of the RHSE conducted while the continuation of the project was jeopardized by proposed budget cuts. The stages of development, problems involved in passing the proposal through the bureaucracy, and issues raised about designing an evaluation for clients who may not implement the evaluation are discussed. The evaluation described was requested/commissioned by the Albany-Schenectady Schoharie Bureau of Occupational and Educational Services located in Albany (New York). The RHSE, a pilot project for gifted and talented students in all academic subjects, is expected to open over the next 5 years. Evaluation design stages addressed conceptualization, rationale for choice of methods, training issues, monitoring the processes involved with clients, and post-implementation strategies for survival. The evaluation plan had a strong documentary focus involving interviews, documents, life histories, teacher journals, student journals, and surveys (including parent involvement surveys). Ethnographic techniques and the use of numerous methods were central to the evaluation design's organization. The evaluation design encompassed resource inputs, processes or activities, and outcomes as compared to objectives. A detailed outline of action components of the qualitative evaluation plan of the school before, during, and after the program was developed; and various evaluation strategies were pilot tested. The aforementioned budget cuts resulted in a postponement of the school project. The life history in teaching survey, teacher evaluation survey, and parents survey instruments are included. (TJH)

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Stages of Developing a Qualitative Evaluation Plan for a Regional High School of Excellence in Upstate New York

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSES

This paper reports the stages of development, problems involved in passing the proposal through the bureaucracy, and issues raised about designing an evaluation for clients who may not implement the evaluation. The evaluation was requested and commissioned by the Albany-Schenectady Schoharie BOCES located in Albany, New York, for the proposed Regional High School of Excellence, (RHSE). The RHSE is a pilot project for gifted and talented students in all academic subjects. The Honorable Mario M. Cuomo, Governor of New York has requested and endorsed this proposal and it is expected that the RHSE will begin in the next five years.

As an evaluator who designed this evaluation plan, I became interested in the meaning of the possible and real problems confronting me as evaluator even though I would be part of the evaluation process long before the RHSE became a reality. In this paper I analyze the following stages in development of the evaluation:

Stage One: Conceptualization, Rationale for choice of Methods, Training issues

Stage Two: Monitoring the processes involved with the clients Initially identified as part of the project

Stage Three: Post Implementation Strategies for survival.

In the midst of stage Two, a major change was realized. The existence of the project itself was jeopardized by budget cut threats.

The evaluation plan had a strong documentary focus involving interviews, documents, life histories, teachers journals, student journals, and some video taped sequences of instruction with analysis. The evaluator had to design strategies to save the plan from extinction. The two main questions guiding the plan through a summer pilot of RHSE had to be addressed:

1) What did we do in the pilot study?

2) How well did we do it?

The paper concludes with a description of how the evaluator managed to set up and implement the summer pilot study of what the main evaluation might look like if the RHSE were implemented in the near future. The bulk of the analysis will address the budget cut threats which are at this writing still pending.

THE PROPOSED REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE (RHSE)

The RHSE proposal grew out of the need to develop a model program to show that public schools can and should strive for excellence in all subjects. The high school to be located in upstate New York is targeted for high school students who are identified as gifted and talented in any number of subjects based on multiple measures of assessment. Early in the proposal generation stage, the Albany-Schenectady-Schoharie BOCES (Bureau of Occupational and Educational Services) the main delivery system for special education, called me to work with them in

developing an evaluation plan from the very beginning of the project.

In order to develop the evaluation plan for the RHSE, it is necessary to describe the choice of evaluation methodology and the strategies to be used in the evaluation plan. A brief historical overview is in order regarding choice of procedure. In the past, three major approaches have been employed by evaluators. These approaches, associated with three generation of evaluators, usually were based on formulas and were summative in nature. Currently, a fourth generation redefines evaluation as a socio-political process that is diagnostic, change-oriented, and educative for all parties involved (See Guba and Lincoln, 1985). It is usually formative in nature.

Guba and Lincoln, (1985), have outlined the distinguishing characteristics and techniques of each generation of evaluators.

(1) THE FIRST GENERATION

This could be called the technical generation. Major tasks involved standardized measures of intelligence, aptitude, and achievement.

(2) THE SECOND GENERATION

This group has been called the descriptive generation. The evaluator described discrepancies between performance and objectives. This was the objective - focused evaluation, which expanded evaluation to include programs and students.

(3) THE THIRD GENERATION

This group of evaluators has been called the judgmental generation. Evaluators used technical measurement and description but added standards against which program performance could be judged. The standards were used to reach a judgement which might be either formative or summative. This group of evaluators focused on organizers other than objectives, including decision models, goal free models, social experimentation models and cost effectiveness models. Stake (1973) pointed out that this approach added the judgmental countenance to the existing descriptive countenance.

(4) THE FOURTH GENERATION

This generation can be called the negotiative generation. The evaluator is not the judge, but rather the person who sets the stage for the judgmental process between respondents and evaluators. The evaluator is a teacher and a learner, conducting a responsive evaluation. The evaluator collects data pertinent to priority claims, concerns, and issues but does not draw conclusions. Rather, the evaluator prepares a report for negotiation which is presented to the stakeholders for their use. The evaluator role becomes one of mediator in the negotiation process.

The major difference in the fourth generation approach from the previous three generations, is notable. First, the evaluator

is no longer seen as a technical expert who discovers the "true" state of affairs, and who possesses objectivity to make the "correct" recommendations. The evaluator is NOT THE JUDGE. Success is assessed in terms of:

(a) the stakeholders increased understanding of the enterprise,

(b) the utility of the proposed agenda for negotiation,

(c) the quality of information provided and,

(d) the expertise displayed in guiding the stakeholding groups through the negotiation process (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, p. 141)

This fourth generation approach has its foundations in the qualitative approach to evaluation. This approach looks at human activities, behaviors, and beliefs, over time in a given social setting in order to understand the many realities occurring in that setting. The qualitative evaluator understands that in dealing with constructed realities, those realities can and often do change when brought into a position of examination. The qualitative evaluator conducts in a way a "co-evaluation," with the stakeholders who dictate the nature of the program. The tools of the qualitative evaluation are well suited to this posture of diagnosis, change, and mutual education.

MAJOR TECHNIQUES OF QUALITATIVE EVALUATION

Ethnographic research techniques have been used widely over the past decade in the areas of policy analysis, and educational

research and evaluation. Dissatisfaction with traditional quantitative designs, (Eisner, 1979; Filstead, 1979) had contributed to the awakened interest in ethnographic techniques which are associated with qualitative inquiry. The commonly used systems-analysis approach (Rivlin, 1971), which developed in economics and industry, has dominated the field of educational evaluation. This approach focuses on measurement of variables which are scaled and quantified easily. In many cases, this approach has been inappropriate to the phenomena under investigation and has produced data of uneven and questionable validity, (Guttentag, 1977; House, 1979; LeCompte, 1970). Consequently, researchers and evaluators gravitated to ethnographic research strategies because of their higher internal validity (Denzin, 1978; Erickson, 1977; Reichardt and Cook, 1979). Literature encouraging ethnography in educational evaluation is prolific (Patton, 1980; Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Fetterman, 1984). The next portion of this paper will describe ethnographic techniques for conducting a qualitative evaluation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHNOGRAPHIES

Ethnographies are analytic descriptions or reconstructions of intact cultural scenes and groups (Spradley and McCurdy, 1972). Ethnographic work is:

(a) holistic rather than fragmented,

(b) focused on the complexities of a social setting,

(c) multimodal, using a variety of techniques,

(d) firsthand, that is directly related to actual beliefs, and behaviors of participants and

(e) phenomenological, that is the representation of the world view of the participants. (Janesick, 1982, 1989).

Three kinds of data provided by ethnographic techniques are useful in assessing the impact of an intervention program or curricular innovation. (See LeCompte, and Goetz, 1984). The three kinds of data include the following:

(1) BASELINE DATA:

Information about the research setting, participants; social, psychological cultural, demographic and physical features about the social context; institutional framework and its relationship with other institutions should be examined for countervailing influences impinging upon change and stability (See Apple and King, 1977; Sharp and Green, 1975).

(2) PROCESS DATA:

Information about what happened in the course of the curricular innovation.

(3) VALUES DATA:

> Information about the values of the participants, program administrators, and policymakers who financed the program: what values the program supports, what is neglected. (Krathwohl, 1980).

These three types of data provide evaluators and stakeholders with flexibility, an open and holistic design, the opportunity to see what actually takes place in a program and the option for improving or changing the status quo.

MULTIPLE METHODS FOR QUALITATIVE EVALUATION

There are a wide variety of methods available to the qualitative evaluator. (Pelto and Pelto, 1978; and Goetz and LeCompte, 1984), have written thorough textbooks detailing these methods. For the purposes of this paper, the author will briefly describe these methods. The major techniques in qualitative/ethnographic work include: (a) participant observation, (b) key informant interviews, (c) life histories, (d) document analysis, and (e) surveys.

(a) Participant Observation

Participant Observers stay in the social setting over time, and by taking field notes, describe the interactions and activities of the key participants in the setting. The role of participant observer can be

seen as a continuum where depending on circumstances, the participant observer may be either more participant or more observer or some combination of both.

(b) Key Informant Interviews

Key informants are the main participants who possess special knowledge, skills, and status in the investigation. Key informants provide insights and information that the evaluator may not otherwise have access to. These are people with firsthand experience in the social setting and may be interviewed any number of times in order to complete whatever inquiry is underway. (See Spradley, 1979, for a detailed description of Ethnographic interviewing.)

(c) Life Histories

Anthropologists have used life history interviewing or written histories as a means to formulate questions or make inferences about a given social group or setting.

(d) Document Analysis

Any documents such as memos, plans, enrollment records, student or teacher made products, correspondence and the like may provide valuable process, baseline, and values data. Any written or pictorial data like photographs may also be used for analysis.

(e) Surveys

Survey instruments may take many forms such as structured interviews or questionnaires, participant-construct devices where researchers ask participants to sort and classify information, and projective devices. Projective devices may include photos, drawings or games designed to elicit people's opinions or reactions. (See LeCompte and Goetz, 1984). Stream of behavior chronicles may also be considered as a survey. These are usually videotaped or recorded on audio tape or handwritten on the spot. Evaluators may sample across events, settings and participants to study themes and questions.

These major techniques can be used in program evaluation in a meaningful way to study innovations. For this reason a qualitative evaluation plan was chosen for the proposed Regional High School of Excellence (RHSE). My first challenge was to check the existing literature on evaluation of gifted and talented programs and find a suitable framework for adjusting to our specific needs.

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE EVALUATING THE RHSE MODEL PROGRAM

Picturing the program often helps in understanding evaluation needs. This framework (FIGURE A) has been designed by Sylvia Rimm (1982) for the Evaluating and Monitoring of a Gifted Program. Stakeholders decided that it had great value for the RHSE and was proposed as the framework for the evaluation plan.

FIGURE A: FRAMEWORK FOR THE EVALUATION
EVALUATION AND MONITORING OF A GIFTED PROGRAM
(RIMM, 1977)

DECISION MAKERS

Step 1-	Step 2-	Step 3-
INPUT (RESOURCES)	PROCESS (ACTIVITIES)	OUTCOME (OBJECTIVES)
Personnel	Teaching Techniques and Organization	General Cognitive Achievement
Books and Materials	Teacher In-Service	Specific Skills Achievement
Equipment	Enrichment Activities	Student Attitudes
	Parental Involvement	Student Behaviors
		Parent
		Community
		Attitudes

Step 4 = Evaluation

This framework is almost self-explanatory. The major components are input, process, and outcome. Each component can

be evaluated using ethnographic techniques to present a comprehensive picture of the impact of a program. This framework may be adapted to the individual needs of any given program at the final evaluation stage. To begin, decision makers need to keep accurate and thorough records of all planning activities as well as each step of this framework. Given and understanding of the qualitative evaluation techniques described and the concept of fourth generation evaluation, the remainder of this paper will deal with the action steps proposed before, during and after program implementation. Each action step will be related to the appropriate component of Rimm's framework.

ACTION COMPONENTS OF THE QUALITATIVE EVALUATION PLAN OF THE RHSE, BEFORE DURING, AND AFTER PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

I. Before Implementation

A. Develop criteria for staff selection (Input)

B. Develop application form for staff (Input)

C. Require staff members to complete a written life history as part of the application. Emphasis should include the applicants interest in teaching, particular interest in the RHSE, and why the person chose teaching as a career. See Protocol A: Life History (Input)

D. After all books and materials are selected, rate these books and materials. See Protocol B: A Guide for Evaluating Materials for Gifted Children (Breiter, 1982)

E. Identify necessary equipment and facilities. (Input)

F. Develop criteria for student selection. Include alternative criteria and identification procedures for minority students and economically disadvantaged students. (Input)

G. Document and record all efforts to identify and recruit minority staff, and students. (Input)

II. <u>During Implementation</u>

A. Implement teacher self appraisal techniques (1) journal writing and (2) evaluation of in-service training survey. See Protocols C and D. (Process)

B. Implement journal writing for teaching staff to include:

(1) description of activities

(2) preparation for activities

(3) number of participants

(4) perceived effectiveness

(5) modifications for the future

(6) data collected.

As Rimm (1982) points out, a personal log kept by all staff members provides formidable documentation of what occurred and forces participants to evaluate themselves. (Process)

C. Develop a questionnaire for parents' attitudes following their child's involvement in the RHSE. (Process and Outcome) See Protocol E: Parents Survey

D. After enrichment activities are planned, develop short survey evaluation form as needed to determine its value to participants. (Process) See Protocol F

III. AFTER IMPLEMENTATION

A. The director should collect student assessment data for presentation in the final report. (Outcome)

B. The Director should collect teacher self-assessment data for presentation in the final report. (Outcome)

C. The Director should compile all pertinent data for a final report.

STAGE TWO: PILOT TEST OF VARIOUS EVALUATION STRATEGIES

Following the first stage of conceptualization, the evaluator met regularly with the Director of the Summer Program to select the appropriate techniques for evaluating the small scale summer gifted and talented program. It was decided that the following techniques would be employed:

a) student logs

b) teacher journals

c) life histories

d) evaluation survey

e) parents survey (see appendices)

Each week, the entire staff would meet to discuss all aspects of the program and it was decided that the Director would keep complete records of these meetings and be responsible for

including information from the meetings in a final evaluation report.

The summer program was successful and participants kept journals faithfully after a training session on journal writing. The next phase was projected to be the actual start up of the RHSE itself.

STAGE THREE: BUDGET CUTS AND THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE RHSE AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THIS.

Unfortunately, the New York State Budget for programs of this nature was substantially cut which resulted in postponement of the RHSE plan. Key participants still voiced their full support of the evaluation plan for the project itself, based on the summer experience. In this, the second year of limbo participants remain hopeful that in the near future the project will be implemented for various socio-political and economic reasons. In any event, as the evaluator, I am still in contact with the participants to keep updated on the situation and would of course like to see the evaluation plan implemented.

The basic lesson learned has to do with the good faith effort of public school personnel who are committed to insuring that the RHSE will be monitored on a regular and sustained basis. The individuals involved took part in in-service training sessions and read appropriate research and evaluation literature to provide a context for understanding their own situation. Furthermore, they designed a pilot study and took extensive records in order to capture exactly what took place in the summer

program. As the evaluator, I prepared a report describing the evaluation plan for the RHSE and the summer pilot program.

After one has completed an evaluation report, the basic question facing the evaluator is "in what ways might this report be useful?" One way to conceptualize the final report is as an educational tool regarding various modes of data, written text, scores, document analysis and the like for other evaluators to learn from. The opinion of many students, teachers, administrators and consultants is that the qualitative data collection techniques capture exactly what is going on as understood by participants in the program. It captures the complexity and wholeness of the program. It captures the tensions and the surprises. In effect, it provides a cultural description and analysis for all participants to read, reflect upon and, learn from. The reporting of a qualitative evaluation from the fourth generation perspective is socio-political in nature. It is meant to be diagnostic, change-oriented if appropriate, and educative for all parties concerned. It is responsive, in that all claims questions, concerns, and issues come from the stakeholding audiences. The evaluator is a negotiator in this arena. Success is assessed in terms of the stakeholders' understanding of the program and its effectiveness. The quality of information depends on the various participants themselves. The qualitative methods of evaluation used in the Pilot study allowed us to understand program effectiveness in a more realistic, authentic, and educative manner.

This evaluation followed certain rules of thumb in hind sight, which may be helpful to those who will conduct evaluations of this type. The three major lessons learned included:

(1) Know your audience,

(2) Stay close to the data, and

(3) don't include everything: Select the material which serves to answer your two major questions:

    (a) What did we do?

    (b) How well did we do this?

As a negotiator, the evaluator becomes part of the decision making process. This involves time, effort and human commitment which can best be evaluated in an atmosphere of openness, understanding, authenticity, and discovery. By keeping in contact with the clients despite the budget cuts, the evaluator remains part of the project anticipating future implementation of the evaluation plan.

APPENDICES

PROTOCOL A: Life History

PROTOCOL B: Teacher Evaluation Survey of In-Service Training (Rimm, 1982)

PROTOCOL C: Parents Survey

PROTOCOL A: My Life History in Teaching

Please write your own history as a teacher. Some guideline questions you might consider in your writing include:

1. What do you enjoy about teaching?
2. What do you not enjoy about teaching?
3. When did you first decide to become a teacher?
4. What effect do you see you have on students?
5. What would you change, if anything, in your current role as a teacher?
6. Why are you a teacher?
7. Can you describe your teaching style?
8. Which students do you enjoy teaching and why?
9. What do you bring to teaching?
10. What do you see yourself doing in the next 5-10 years?

PROTOCOL B: Teacher Evaluation Survey

of In-Service Training

(Rimm, 1982)

EVALUATION FORM:

Circle the appropriate number below:

1. I found this program to be...

1	2	3	4	5
Dull		of Average Interest		Very Interesting

2. I think what I heard will be...

1	2	3	4	5
Useless		Somewhat Useful		Very Useful

3. I would like to have more in-service programs on this topic.

1	2	3	4
No, not at all	Yes, but not for a while	Yes, more soon	Other (Explain below)

Explanation_____

_____

_____

4. The things I liked most about this in-service were: _____

_____

_____

5. The things I liked least about this in-service were: _____

_____

_____

PROTOCOL C: Parents Survey

Parents' Reactions

Circle the appropriate numbers below:

1. Based on my child's experience in the RHSE, I would say the program was:

1	2	3	4	5
Not very Successful		Somewhat Successful		Extremely Successful

2. I would like my child to continue in the RHSE, should it be continued.

1	2	3
Yes	No	Other (Explain)

Explanation: _____

_____

_____

3. The things I like most about my child's experience were: ___

_____

_____

4. The things I liked least about my child's experience were: _

_____

_____

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